

Most Often Asked Tree Questions by the Public

1. How do I have the City trim or prune the tree in front of my house?

Call the Parks and Recreation Department and a service request form will be made to inspect the tree to determine maintenance needs. The arborist or tree inspector will inspect the tree(s) within 10 working days and prioritize these requests.

2. Who do I call if a tree, large branch, or palm fronds have fallen or are obstructing the street or sidewalk?

Call the Parks and Recreation Department service desk at 564-5433 between 8am to 4pm Monday through Friday and your call will be referred to the appropriate staff person. On weekends, holidays, or outside of normal working hours, call the City Emergency phone number at 963-4286. For serious, life-threatening situations or accidents/injuries, call 911.

3. How do I know if the tree in front of my house is a city-owned and city-maintained tree?

It is a city tree if it is growing in the parkway (the area between the curb and sidewalk) or if the tree trunk is within six feet of a street curb on streets with no sidewalks.

4. How do I know if the tree in front of my house is a City, County, or a private tree?

A city tree must be in along a city street as defined in question 3 above. If the tree location is in Goleta or Montecito, please call the Santa Barbara County Public Works Department Road Maintenance Division at 681-5678. Any trees or shrubs that are on private property or within the city street right-of-way, but not conforming to the criteria in #3, are the private owner's responsibility to maintain.

5. Do I need a permit to prune or remove a tree that is in the street/sidewalk easement area?

Yes. The Parks Division staff will inspect the tree to determine what actions are necessary and will either issue the appropriate permit or choose to schedule the city to perform the work instead.

6. Do I need a permit to remove a tree in my front yard or on private property?

You do need a permit to remove a tree located in the minimum front yard area of any property in the City. It is also prohibited to prune a tree in such a way that it alters its natural character or reduces its overall size by more than 1/3 without a permit to ensure that a tree will not be destroyed by improper pruning. Trees that were planted as a condition of approval by the city ABR or Planning Commission also require a permit for removal.

You do not need a permit to trim or remove a front yard tree with a trunk diameter less than four inches measured at a point 12 inches above the ground or palm trees less than 3 feet in height or a tree that is dead or diseased. However, this must be verified by inspection by an authorized employee of the City Parks & Recreation Department or by a certificate filed with the Parks & Recreation Director by a member of the American Society of Consulting Arborists.

7. When will the City remove or issue a permit for the removal of a tree in the parkway or street roadway easement?

In most cases the City will only remove or permit the removal of dead, seriously diseased, or hazardous trees upon the inspection and recommendation of the arborist or tree inspector. To request the removal of a street tree or tree located in the minimum front yard, you must file a completed Street Tree Removal Request Application or a Front Yard Setback Tree Removal Request Application or write a letter detailing the reasons for your request to the City Arborist. These requests are reviewed by city staff and the City Street Tree Advisory Committee and considered by the City Park and Recreation Commission for approval or denial.

8. What if the tree roots are causing serious and expensive damage to the street and sidewalk or are growing into the sewer or water lines that serve my property? Will the City then remove and replace the tree, or give me a permit to do so?

Damage to sidewalks and sewer lines are not normally considered justification for removing otherwise healthy and safe street trees. Sidewalk damage should be referred to the City Streets Division, 564-5413, for sidewalk repair or replacement. Root damage to sewers is usually the result of an old sewer line that allows roots to enter. To avoid repeated root intrusion sewer lines need to be repaired with impervious materials.

8. Do I need a permit from the City to remove a healthy oak tree or other native tree from my property?

The City does not have a species specific native oak tree preservation ordinance pertaining to trees on private property. The City does have a **front yard tree preservation ordinance** that covers all species of trees growing within the private front yard landscape setback area which are healthy and over four inches in trunk diameter measured at 12 inches above ground. To obtain a permit to remove a tree located in the minimum front yard area, you must complete a Front Yard Setback Tree Removal Request Application which will be reviewed by city staff and the Street Tree Advisory Committee and considered by the Parks & Recreation Commission for approval or denial.

9. How do I get a tree planted in the empty parkway area in front of my house?

The City has a designated tree species for planting along all “improved” city streets (meaning streets with concrete curbs along the edge of the road). If you want the designated tree species to be planted, a service request will be made and your request will be placed on a list for future street planting. A permit can also be issued for you to plant the city specified tree.

Please do not plant any other tree or shrubs in your parkway without a permit from the City. For safety and access reasons, the City must determine what trees and plants are allowable for planting in parkways. Other than city-specified trees, only low growing plants or groundcovers which at maturity will not exceed eight inches in height and will allow light pedestrian traffic to walk across parkway are approved for private owner parkway planting.

By law, (City ordinance 15.20), the property owner is responsible for maintaining safe, level parkway surfaces and caring for all plants in the parkway other than city streets. This is essential to ensure pedestrian safety and vehicle operator safe visibility across parkways and at all intersections.

10. How do I get a memorial or commemorative tree planted with a marker?

Santa Barbara Beautiful, a local non-profit organization, is authorized to sell commemorative street trees (either existing trees or trees to be planted in cooperation with City Parks Division). All orders should be processed through SBB by calling 965-8867.

The City Parks and Recreation Department sells and provides markers for trees planted in city parks through our affiliated nonprofit P.A.R.C. Foundation. Inquires and orders for park trees may be processed by contacting Terri Yamada, Parks Division Administrative Assistant, at 564-5484.

11. What can I do if a neighbor’s tree near the property line is blocking my view or drops debris in my yard or has dangerous limbs that may fall onto my property?

The City Parks and Recreation Department does not mediate such disputes. These are matters that must be resolved between the affected parties. You may need the support and assistance of a qualified consulting arborist to resolve such disputes.

For your information, the City does have a “View Protection Ordinance” (MC Section 22.76) that establishes a procedure for reaching a resolution of these situations. The city is not responsible for enforcement of any existing private property codes, covenants, or restrictions which may pertain to vegetation obscuring views.

12. Who is responsible for shrubbery and vegetation other than street trees that grow into public sidewalks or streets?

The property owner adjacent to the sidewalk or street is responsible for maintaining plants to keep them from encroaching into street and sidewalks and creating an obstruction or limiting visibility. Property owners will be noticed by the city to clear the vegetation. Vegetation encroaching into public streets and sidewalks should be reported to the Public Works Department at 564-5395.

13. What can be done if trees are growing into power lines?

Low voltage phone and service lines, (SCE or Cable T.V.) are not normally emergency situations and will be cleared during scheduled pruning maintenance. The city will clear limbs from city maintained street trees. Trees not maintained by the city are the responsibility of the property owner to correct with proper pruning. Conflicts with high voltage Edison transmission lines are serious and should be specifically reported to the attention of the South California Edison line clearing service representative at 654-7411.

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